

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A VALIANT IGNORANCE.

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CHAPTER XVII.

ON finding himself condemned to twelve months in London, Dennis Falconer had debated the question of where he should live at some length, and had finally decided on returning to some rooms in the neighbourhood of the Strand, in which he had been wont to establish himself during his temporary residences in London for the past fifteen years. It was not a fashionable part of London. Falconer was a richer man now than he had been fifteen years before, and there were sundry luxuries to be had in those quarters of London where wealthy bachelors congregate, which were not recognised so far south of Piccadilly. It was also natural to him to think twice before he abandoned the idea of living where it was "the proper thing"—of the hour—to live. But he was known and respected in his old rooms; he would be received there with deferential delight; he would be of the first importance in his landlady's estimation; and these things, little as he knew it, had a distinct influence on his decision.

The two rooms which he occupied, on the first floor, bore a strong likeness to the majority of first-floor rooms in the same street, occupied by single gentlemen. These gentlemen were not, as a rule, of the class who think it worth while to impress their artistic character upon the room in which they live; as a whole, indeed, they might have been said to lack artistic character. Here and there was a

more inveterate smoker, newspaper-reader, or novel-reader, as the case might be, the sign manual of whose tastes was not to be obliterated. But as a rule it was the landlady's taste that reigned supreme and monotonous.

Dennis Falconer's rooms were no exception to the rule. The furniture was very comfortable, very solid, and very ugly, in the style of thirty years ago; an artistic temperament would have modified the whole appearance of the room, insensibly and necessarily, in the course of a week. But Falconer was not even conscious that anything was wrong. He was as nearly devoid of æsthetic sense, even on its broadest lines, as it is possible for a civilised man to be; and the state of mind which takes pleasure in the tone of curtains and carpets, and the form of tables, chairs, or chins, was to him incomprehensible and consequently a little contemptible.

On a November morning, with an incipient yellow fog hanging about, the appearance of the room in which breakfast was waiting for him was calculated to cast a gloom over a temperament never so little open to such influences, and Dennis Falconer as he opened his bedroom door and came slowly out, looked as though his mental atmosphere was already sufficiently heavy. He always breakfasted punctually at nine o'clock, and he never went to bed before one; it simply never occurred to him to make any concession to the emptiness of his present life by spending more than seven hours out of the twenty-four in sleep, even if he had been physically able to do so; and there were days when the intervening seventeen hours hung on his hands with an almost unendurable weight. He had never been a man who readily made friends, and his tendency in this direction had

steadily decreased as he grew older, so that the few men with whom he was intimate were friends of his early manhood; and, as it happened, none of these intimates were in England at the moment. He was absolutely incapable of forming those cheery, unmeaning acquaintanceships which make the savour of life to so many unoccupied men. He was one of those men with whom no one thinks of becoming familiar; who is vaguely supposed either to have a private and select circle of friends, or to be sufficient for himself; whose demeanour, correct, self-contained, and a trifle formal, seems to hold the world at a distance. Consequently his intercourse with his fellow-creatures was limited by his present life to slight conversation on the topics of the day at his club, or in various drawing-rooms where he paid grave, stiff calls, or attended stately functions. Cut off from his own particular work he had no interests and no pursuits.

It was a dreary life, in truth, and it was little wonder that Falconer's expression grew rather more austere with every week. The sentiments of a man of his temperament towards a world in which there was so little place for him, and from which he could derive so little satisfaction, would inevitably tend towards stern disapproval.

On this particular morning the sense of dearth was very heavy upon him. On the previous day he had had an interview with the great doctor to whose fiat he owed his detention in London. The great doctor had been indefinite and unsatisfactory; had looked grave and talked vaguely about troublesome complications and a possible necessity of complete repose. Falconer had made no sign of discomposure, had taken his leave with his usual courteous gravity, and had left the consulting-room with a cold chill at his heart. The cold chill was about it still this morning as he walked to his window before going to the breakfast-table, and stood there looking blankly out. What he was really looking at was the prospect before him if, as the doctor had hinted, he should have to lie up for a time. A lodging and a nurse, or a hospital; solitude and confinement in either case.

He sighed heavily, and turning as though with the instinct to turn away from his troubles, he sat down to the table, poured out his coffee, and took up the letters lying by his plate. There were only two—one in a common-looking envelope directed in an illiterate hand, the other

in a clear, characteristic man's hand, at the sight of which his face brightened perceptibly.

"Aston," he said to himself, and opened it quickly.

His friendship for the little doctor, which time had only served to strengthen, was, perhaps, the most genial sentiment of Dennis Falconer's life, and Dr. Aston's absence in India at this particular period had been a bitter disappointment to him. He had hoped for some time that the doctor's plans—always of a somewhat erratic nature—might bring him back to London shortly, and as his eyes fell on the first sentence of the letter a slight sound of intense relief escaped him—an eloquent testimony to his present loneliness. Dr. Aston began by telling him that he would be in England before Christmas.

The letter was long and interesting; it abounded in bits of vivid description and shrewd observation, and its comments on Falconer's proceedings were keen and kindly. Its recipient allowed himself to become absorbed in it to the total neglect of his breakfast, and his expression was lighter than it had been for weeks when he came upon these sentences towards the close of the letter:

"By-the-by, in the 'latest intelligence' of London society—all is fish in the shape of human nature that comes to my net, as you know, and I study that curious institution carefully whenever I get the chance—I constantly, nowadays, come across the name of a Mrs. Romayne. 'The charming Mrs. Romayne and her good-looking son' is the usual formula. It is not by any chance the little woman with whom I got myself and you into such a terrible fix years and years ago at Nice—William Romayne's widow? Is it any relation? I should like to know what became of that little woman, if you can tell me—she had stuff in her—and whether the boy has dree'd his weird yet."

Falconer laid down the letter abruptly, and turned to his breakfast, his face stern and uncompromising. His interview with Mrs. Romayne, now a fortnight old, had accentuated markedly his grim disapprobation of her, and the strong feeling of reprobation that stirred him then had so little subsided that the least touch was enough to re-endow it with vigorous life.

"Stuff in her!" he muttered, with a world of contempt in the curt ejaculation. "Stuff in her! If Aston only knew!"

He glanced at the letter again, and a certain disapproval, personal to the writer, expressed itself in the grave set of his lips as he re-read the words about Julian; his whole mental and moral attitude was antagonistic to, and inclined to condemn, what he characterised now as "Aston's dangerous theories." He passed with what seemed to him practical sense from "Aston's extravagance" to a stern consideration of the heinousness of such a life and education as Julian's for a young man in Julian's position. Julian's position, rightly considered, involved in his eyes a reaping in obscurity, humility, and sombreness of life of the harvest of shame and disgrace which his father had sown; and that there was anything inconsistent between this view of the case and his condemnation of Dr. Aston's theories he was utterly unaware.

He applied himself to his breakfast, still meditating on Mrs. Romaine and the probable consequences of her callousness, and then he took up the other letter and opened it.

At the opening of his last expedition, one of the men attached to it had met with a disabling accident, and had been sent home. The man had been with Falconer on a previous expedition, and when the latter returned to England he had made enquiries about him, and had finally, and with no little difficulty, traced him out to find him crippled for life, and in a state of abject poverty. Falconer, according to his narrow and orthodox lights, as strictly conventional in their way as were Mrs. Romaine's in hers, was a good man. The letter he was reading now, from the wife of this man, was written by a woman by whom he was regarded as a kind of Providence; to be revered indeed, not loved, but to be revered with all her heart. She and her husband had been rescued by him from despair; all that medical skill could do for the man had been done at his expense. The pair had been settled by him in a small house in Camden Town, where Mrs. Dixon, a brisk, capable woman, was to let lodgings. To this house Falconer had been once or twice to see the crippled man; and he was not now surprised to receive from the wife the information—conveyed in a style in which natural loquacity struggled with awe of her correspondent—that the husband had had one of the bad attacks of suffering to which he was liable, and that if Mr. Falconer could spare half an

hour, Dixon would "take it very kind with his duty."

Falconer smiled grimly at the words "if Mr. Falconer could spare half an hour." His whole day was practically at Dixon's disposal. He would go up to Camden Town that afternoon, he decided; he almost wished he had thought of going before, and as the thought crossed his mind, the remembrance of what might possibly be lying in wait for himself in the not very distant future made him rise abruptly and thrust his letters into his pocket.

It was about twelve o'clock when he left his rooms and walked slowly away in the direction of club-land. He usually got through an hour or so at his club before lunch, reading the papers and so forth. The threatening fog of three hours earlier had rolled away, and there were gleams of wintry sunshine about which made walking pleasant. Dr. Aston's letter had cheered Falconer considerably; the feeling, too, that he had a definite occupation for his afternoon, and an occupation which was not invented, was invigorating; and altogether he was in better spirits than he had been for many a day. He was walking up Waterloo Place, when his eyes, which could not forego, even in a London street, their trained habits of keen, accurate observation, lighted on Marston Loring, who was coming down Waterloo Place on the opposite side of the road. Loring was a man Dennis Falconer particularly disliked, and after one disapproving glance he was looking away, when he saw the other suddenly stop with a movement—and evidently an exclamation—of surprise and welcome. In the same instant he became aware that Julian Romaine had turned out of a side-street, and was greeting his friend apparently with effusion. Falconer's brow clouded involuntarily. The instinct of kin was so strong in him that there was a certain touch of personal feeling, little as he wished it, in his connection with the Romaines which made the thought of them particularly disagreeable to him; and here, for the second time to-day, the young man and his mother were forced upon his notice. He pursued his way up the street, watching Julian grimly, and as he passed, still on the opposite pavement, the corner where the two young men were standing, Julian happened to look across, saw him, and made a ready, courteous gesture of salutation. Falconer returned it stiffly enough, and walked on.

Julian turned to Loring with a laugh.

"Old bear!" he said; "I wish he'd take himself off to Africa or somewhere. He's a regular wet blanket to have about! Well, old fellow, and what's the news?"

Julian was looking very fresh, vigorous, and full of life. There was a curious suggestion about him of alertness which was not without a certain excitement; and his tone and manner as he spoke were almost superabundantly frank and loquacious.

Ten days before, Loring had received a note from Mrs. Romayne telling him that Julian was going for a week's holiday to Brighton, and that the alteration in his room must be completed if possible in his absence. "It is a sudden idea with him, apparently," she had written; "but do let us take advantage of it."

If Loring had had his own private notion on the subject of this sudden idea on Julian's part he had made no sign to Julian's mother; he had paid, in silence, his cynical tribute to the maternal wisdom which had presumably recognised the fact that if freedom is not granted it will be snatched.

Three days had now passed since Julian's return, but it had happened—he himself could perhaps have told how—that until this Saturday afternoon he and Loring had not met. There was nothing in his face and manner at this moment, however, but the most lively, even demonstrative satisfaction, and without giving Loring time to answer his question he went on, with an ease and gaiety which were very like, and yet unlike, his mother.

"Where were you off to? The club? Come and have some lunch with me, do! I want to tell you how first-rate I think my room. I hear you've taken no end of trouble over it. It was awfully jolly of you, old man!"

"Glad you like it," returned Loring nonchalantly. "Yes, I think it's nice. But it was Mrs. Romayne who took the trouble."

He was studying Julian keenly, though quite imperceptibly, as he spoke, trying to arrest and dissect a certain self-sufficiency or independence about him which seemed to alter their relation in some way. The young man's manner was assumed—of that Loring was quite aware. But what exactly did it hide? What exactly was the secret?

He debated this question calmly with himself throughout the lunch which they

took together a little later on; interposing question and remarks the while into Julian's flow of fluent talk and laughter. About Brighton, in particular, Julian was full of chatter, and as he wound up a vivacious description of his doings there, Loring commented mentally:

"He hasn't been to Brighton at all!"

Aloud he said, as genially as nature ever allowed him to speak:

"Well, it's very jolly to see you back again, my boy. Do you know we've seen next to nothing of one another lately, and I vote we turn over a new leaf, eh? What are you going to do this afternoon, now?"

He was leaning back in his chair lighting a cigarette as he spoke, and apparently his attention was wholly claimed by the process; as a matter of fact, however, he was studying Julian's face intently, and his sense of annoyance was not untinged with admiration when not a muscle of that good-looking face moved. Julian leant back and crossed his legs airily.

"I promised to go to the Eastons', I'm sorry to say!" he said. "It's an awful bore! We might have done a theatre together!"

Now, the Eastons were mutual acquaintances of the two men, but it so happened that they had taken irremediable offence against Loring over some detail connected with the bazaar, and it was no longer possible for him to call upon them. Julian was of course aware of the fact, and Loring smiled cynically at what he recognised as a very clever move.

"A pity!" he said composedly. "Better luck another time. Well, you're not in any hurry, anyway."

"Not a bit!" assented Julian, cheerfully disposing of himself in a most comfortable and stationary attitude. But a moment later he sprang to his feet. "By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I nearly forgot! I've got a commission to do for my mother in Bond Street—shop closes at two. Can I do it?"

A hurried reference to his watch assured him that he would just do it, and with a hasty farewell he dashed out of the room. Loring did not propose to accompany him. It was not worth while, he told himself; and he smiled sardonically as Julian departed.

"I shall find out," he said to himself. "Of course I shall find out! The question is, is it worth while to wait, or shall I play my game with what I know? The attached friend of the boy warning his mother in

time"—he smiled again very unpleasantly—"or the sympathising friend of the mother having made a terrible discovery! Which is the better pose? The latter, I think. Yes, the latter! I'll wait until I've made my discovery."

He dropped the end of his cigarette into an ash-tray, sat for a moment more in deep thought, and then rose and strolled slowly away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JULIAN, meanwhile, hailed a passing hansom, sprang into it, and told the man to drive, not to Bond Street but to the Athenæum, Camden Town. There was an air about him as of one who plumes himself on having done a clever thing, and as he settled himself for his long drive there was a curious excitement and radiance in his face. When the cab reached its destination at last he jumped out and walked rapidly and eagerly away.

It was not a neighbourhood likely to be familiar to a young man about town, but Julian pursued his way with the certainty of a man who had followed it several times before. In about ten minutes he turned into a neat and respectable little street, consisting of two short rows of small houses with diminutive bow windows to the first-floor rooms. About half-way down he stopped at a house on the right-hand side and knocked with a quick, decided touch. He was an object of the deepest interest as he stood upon the little doorstep to a brisk, curious-looking woman who was standing in the ground-floor window of the house opposite, but her opportunity for observation was brief. The door was opened almost immediately, and with a pleasant greeting to the woman, who stood aside, he passed her and ran upstairs—a course of action evidently expected of him. He opened the door of the front room on the first floor and went eagerly in.

"Here I am!" he cried. "Did you expect me so soon?"

Standing in the middle of the room, as though she had suddenly started from her chair, with her hands outstretched towards him, was Clemence, and on the third finger of that thin left hand there shone a bright gold ring.

Her face was a delicate rosy red, as though with sudden joy just touched with shyness, and all the beauty which had been latent in her tired, work-worn face seemed to have been touched into vivid, almost startling life, by the hand of a great

magician. By contrast with the face she turned to Julian now, the large eyes deep and glowing, the mouth trembling a little with tenderness, the face of a month ago, pure and sweet as it had been, would have looked like the inanimate mask of a dormant soul. The soul was awake now, quivering with consciousness; womanhood had come with a purity and beauty beyond any possibility of girlhood. Looking at her face now, it was easy to see by what means alone the latent strength of her gentle character might be developed—by the means of love.

He drew her into his arms with an eager, confident touch, and she yielded to him completely, clinging to him with the colour deepening in her face as he kissed it boyishly again and again. It was a fortnight only since he had kissed her first.

"I was watching for you," she said softly. "I heard your step."

He laughed exultantly and kissed her again.

"I thought you'd be watching!" he said. "Though I'm earlier than I told you, do you know? Much earlier! I say, Clemence, how jolly the room looks!"

It was a small room, furnished and decorated in the simplest and cheapest style; as great a contrast as could well be imagined to the rooms to which he was accustomed. But it was very clean and very comfortable-looking; and there was a homelike, restful atmosphere about it which might well have radiated from the slender figure in the plain grey dress, with that shining wedding-ring and lovely, flushing face. She smiled, a very sweet, pleased little smile.

"Do you think so really?" she said. "I am so glad. It is that beautiful basket-chair you sent, and the flowers." She glanced as she spoke at a pot of chrysanthemums standing on a little table in the window. Then she turned to him again, her eyes a little deprecating. "Do you think you ought to spend so much money?" she said shyly.

Julian laughed, and flung his arm round her as he surveyed the little room with a vivid air of proprietorship. Here he was master. Here his word was law. Here he was in a world of his own making, and his only fellow-creature was his subject.

"It looks jolly!" he pronounced again as a final dictum. "Now, come and sit down, Clemence, and tell me what you've

been doing since yesterday!" He settled himself into the arm-chair by the fire with a lordly air as he spoke, adding: "Come and sit on this stool by me, like the sweetest girl in the world."

Clemence hesitated, hardly perceptibly. Hers was a nature to which trivial endearments came strangely, almost painfully. She had not yet learned to caress in play; and there was an innate, unconscious, personal dignity about her to which trivial self-abasement was unnatural. But almost before she was conscious of her reluctance there swept over her, like a great wave of hot sweetness, the remembrance that she was his wife! It was her duty to do as he wished. She came softly across the room, sat down on the stool he had drawn out, and laid her cheek against his arm.

It was a trivial action, very quietly performed, but it was instinct with the beauty of absolute self-abnegation; and as if, as her physical presence touched him, something of her spirit touched him too, a sudden quiet fell upon the exultant, self-satisfied boy at whose feet she sat. Not for the first time, by any means, there stole over Julian a vague uneasiness; a vague realisation of something beyond his ken; something in the light of which he shrank, unaccountably, from himself. His hand closed round the woman's hand lying in his with a touch very different from the boyish passion of his previous caresses, and for a moment he did not speak. Then he said slowly and in a low, dreamy voice:

"Clemence, I can't think why you should ever have loved me!"

The hand in his thrilled slightly, and the head on his shoulder was just shaken. Clemence could not tell him why she loved him. The bald outline she could trace as most women can trace it. She could look back upon her first sense of reliance, her pity, her admiration, her sense of strange, delightful companionship; but the why and wherefore of it, the mystery which had given to this young man and no other the key of her soul, this was to her as a miracle, as, indeed, there is always something miraculous in it, even when it seems most natural. To account for love; to say that in this case it is natural, in this case it is unnatural; is to confess ignorance of the first great attribute of love—that it is supernatural and divine.

There was another silence, a longer one this time, and the strange spell sank deeper

into Julian's spirit. He said nothing. It would have been a relief to him to speak; to reduce to words, or, indeed, to definite consciousness, the vague trouble that oppressed him; but its outlines were too large and too vague for him. It was in truth a sense of total moral insolvency, but he could not understand it as such, having no moral standpoint. Clemence neither moved nor spoke; her hand lay motionless in his; her cheek rested against him; her beautiful eyes looked straight before them with a dreamy, almost awestruck gaze.

At last, with a desperate determination to thrust away so unusual an oppression, Julian moved slightly and began to talk. He wanted to get back his sense of superiority, and his voice accordingly took its most boyish and masterful tone.

"You haven't told me what you've been doing, Clemence?" he said. "Have you given notice at your bonnet shop as I told you?"

Clemence lifted her head and sat up, clasping her hands lightly on the arm of his chair.

"No!" she said gently. "I thought I would ask you to think about it again. I would so much rather go on if you didn't mind. For one thing, what could I do all day?" She looked up into his face as she spoke with deprecating, pleading eyes, which were full of submission, too; and the submission was very pleasant to Julian.

"I do mind," he said authoritatively. "I can't have it, Clemence. I can't always see you home, don't you see, and I won't have you about at night alone. Besides, I don't choose that you should work."

"But I do so want to!" she said, laying her hand timidly and beseechingly on his. "It will be so difficult for you to keep us both; you will overwork yourself, I'm so afraid. Oh, won't you let me help? I've always worked, you know; it doesn't hurt me. You don't want to forget that you've married a work-girl, do you?"

She smiled at him as she spoke, one of her sweet, rare smiles, and he kissed her impetuously.

"Don't talk nonsense!" he said imperiously. "I can't allow it, and that's all about it. How do you suppose I could attend to my work when I'm kept at the hospital in the evening, if I were thinking all the time of you alone in the streets! No, you must give notice on Monday!"

She looked at him wistfully for a moment. He was condemning her to long days of idleness, to constant uneasiness and

self-reproach on his behalf, to a certain loss of self-respect. But self-sacrifice was instinctive with her.

"Very well!" she said simply.

The little victory, the assertion of authority restored Julian's spirits completely, and he plunged into discursive talk more or less egotistical. It was all necessarily founded on falsehood, and it would have been a delicate question to decide when his talk ceased to be consciously untruthful, and became the expression of a fictitious Julian in whom the real Julian absolutely believed.

The afternoon wore on; the winter twilight fell, bringing with it a slight return of the fog of the morning; two hours had passed before Julian moved reluctantly, and said that he must go.

"I shall come to-morrow!" he said, taking her face between his hands and kissing it. "We'll go out into the country if it's fine. I wish it was summer-time! Have you ever seen the river, Clemence?"

"Not in the country," she said. "It must be nice! How much you've seen! Do you know I often think that you must wish sometimes I was a lady! I don't know anything and I haven't seen anything, and——" she faltered, and he rose, laughing and drawing her up into his arms.

"Any one can know things," he said lightly, "and any one can see things. But no one but you can be Clemence! Do you see? Oh, what a bore it is to have to go!"

He was lingering, undecidedly, as though a little pressure would have scattered his resolution to the winds, and seated him once more in the chair he had just quitted. But, since he had said that he must go, it never occurred to Clemence to ask him to stay. If it were not his duty he would never leave her. If it was his duty now, how could she hold him back!

"To-morrow will come!" she said, looking into his face with a brave smile.

"I don't believe you want me to stay!" he returned, half laughing, half vexed.

"Don't I?" she said simply, and he caught her in his arms again.

"What a shame!" he said. "There, good-bye! Are you coming to the door?"

She shook her head.

"I'll stay here," she said; "and watch you from the window. I see you farther so. Ah, it's rather foggy! I'm so sorry! You'll look up? Good-bye!"

She lifted her face to his and kissed him tenderly and shyly, and he left her standing by the window.

Julian ran downstairs, let himself out, and stood for a moment on the doorstep as he realised the disagreeable nature of the atmosphere. At the same instant the door of the house opposite opened, and a man came out, attended to the threshold by a woman. She caught sight of Julian instantly, and said something to the man, as he stood in the shadow, in a deferential whisper. Julian shook himself, confounded the fog, and then glanced up at the window from which the light streamed on his face. He waved his hand, turned away, and walked rapidly down the street, pulling up his coat collar as he went.

As he went, Dennis Falconer slowly descended the two steps of that opposite house, and slowly—very slowly—followed him.

A WESTERN DINNER PARTY.

It might even have been called the dinner party, for it was the only one of the kind I ever went to during the whole of my life out West.

One day E. and I rode over for a change to Sedalia, a small city on the Santa Fé track, across the Divide. We started, after a very early dinner, at eleven a.m., for we both of us wanted to get home betimes, as we had to churn and bake next day. It was a lovely ride across the prairie; rather hot, perhaps, for some people, for there was hardly any shade to be had along the road, which was of the roughest and most primitive description. When we reached the city—every place out West that boasts of a depôt, section-house, store, and water-tank is dignified by the name of a city—all the men, women, and children we met were eating quarters of water-melon as hard as they could, and we felt that reward for our long and dusty ride, in the shape of a big section of melon, was at hand. Evidently there had been a "boom" on melons, for we saw them piled up upon the counters of the stores, and lying in great heaps up at the depôt. Cantelupes and water-melons both could be bought for a nickel apiece, and a section of the fruit for two cents; and tired and hot as we were after our long ride, we soon "caught on" to the prevailing craze, realising, as we plunged our faces into the cool pink flesh, the truth of the

proverb: "In eating melon, you both eat, drink, and wash your face." The fact was that there had been a fruit train wrecked below the city, and sooner than wait to carry such perishable freight on to its destination, it had been almost given away. How we wished we had not been riding; we could have packed the buggy with fruit for a mere song, and revelled in it to our hearts' content, and even have made no end of sweet pickle out of the rind, but these things were not to be. However, we each invested in a couple, determined to convey them home somehow. This was a pretty good allowance for two women on horseback, especially as some of the melons were so large that one arm had to be given up entirely to them. Then, having thoroughly refreshed the horses and ourselves, and bought a twenty-five cent novel each, we set off home again, E. suggesting that we should call on the way at "Wild Cat Ranch," and visit Mr. Ffrench. This I was very glad to do, having heard so much of the gentleman in question, who was quite the character of our little English community. He had the reputation of being the cleanest, and yet the dirtiest, man in the district, had never been seen with a hat on his head, no matter in what extreme of heat or cold, and, in consequence, had got his face tanned to the colour of mahogany, lighted up by a pair of keen blue eyes. Moreover, I was told he belonged to a good old English family—of course, his real name is not given here—and was, besides, a very clever man with a good college degree, and a fine classical scholar. One could not help wondering what such a man was doing out on the Western prairie, for he had no ranch attached to his house, and was neither rich in cattle, real estate, nor mines. He had a very good shanty and grounds, so E. said, and what was for those parts a fairly good income, supplied by his friends in the old country; and besides all this he had, what we all thought much more of, a lovely, irrigated garden, where he grew all kinds of English flowers and fruit.

No one quite knew the reason of his exile, although, of course, there were many rumours afloat, scandal being rife in all countries, old or new. To speak from personal knowledge, E. said he had the kindest heart, and was very good to all the children on the different ranches around, although his many strange ways were against him.

With Mr. Ffrench at present lived another queer bird, the kindest old soul I ever met, Walters by name, but always called Benny. These two were great friends, and when times were bad, and the remittances from home slow in coming, would try many ways to earn the needful dollar. Once Benny and a chum even hawked fish round Denver City, and a friend who went to see them found the fish and themselves living in one room in company with a big fire. They regaled him with haddock for breakfast, salmon for dinner, and white-fish for supper, but after a few days of exclusively fish diet, he concluded that he had had enough, and took the cars home. Benny also had friends in the old country, but his was a very poor allowance indeed, and as soon as it arrived he went to Denver, took up his abode at Charpiôt's, and spent his substance, not in riotous living, but on horse-racing, of which he was inordinately fond, and at which he was proverbially unlucky.

Benny, however, was an universal favourite, and was allowed the run of his teeth at Charpiôt's, until some kind friend would put him on the cars and frank him home again. Unlike Mr. Ffrench, he was the soul of neatness, and very particular about his personal appearance; he had the happiest, most contented of dispositions, and would walk miles across the prairie—poor Benny never attained to a horse, and I need hardly say what that meant out West—to see his friends, who were always pleased to put up the happy, contented little man for weeks together. When times were very bad he would board round at the different ranches, doing odd jobs and chores for his "grub stakes," i.e. keep.

Now he had taken up his abode with Mr. Ffrench, and seemed happy enough, yet E. said her heart used to ache for poor Benny at times, thinking what would become of him in his old age. E. told me all this on our way home; and a funny couple we must have looked, having many groceries tied up in gunny-sacks hanging on to our saddles, whilst we had cleverly disposed of our water-melons in two of the same useful receptacles, tied round our waists to prevent their getting bruised against the saddle during the long ride home. Altogether we must have looked, had there been any one to see us, like a couple of female John Gilpins.

When we arrived at Mr. Ffrench's I little guessed the treat in store for me,

and could nearly have cried with joy when we rode up to the gate. For there in front of us lay a veritable English garden, with all the dear old country flowers in it. There was a well-kept path up the middle with a long border on each side, and a lovely green plot of grass, with a bed in the centre, so different, with its soft green turf, to the parched-up prairie grass we had been riding over. There were roses, fringed pinks, hollyhocks, marigolds, and great clusters of mignonette; whilst the bordering was made of pink-and-white hen-and-chicken daisies. E. and I looked first at the flowers, then at each other, and then at the flowers again; and although neither of us spoke, I knew our thoughts had taken a long journey.

At last we came back to every-day life, and looked round for the owner of this earthly paradise. The shanty was a good one, but much the same as all the others on the ranches round us, bar the garden; but a great zinc water-tank, about five feet high, at a little distance off, with a garden hose attached to it, gave the secret of all the verdancy around us; although there was nothing to be seen of any human being. Inside the tank an energetic splashing was going on at intervals, and I was very much surprised when E. called out:

"Hi! Mr. Ffrench, will you come here? I want you, please." And still more surprised when she turned to me. "He's in the tank, I guess; he is always bathing!"

And sure enough in a moment or two a head was upraised over the top of the tank, and a voice said, to my horror:

"Oh, it's you, is it, Mrs. S.? Wait a minute, and I'll get out and come along to you."

This was truly a wonderful country I had come to, but I was there to take things as they came, so waited meekly for the sequence of events, E. exclaiming, as she saw my astonished face, and gasping out between her laughter:

"You'll be the death of me, Mollie; he—he always tubs with all his clothes on."

This was indeed a relief to my mind; but how was I to have known it? And presently a dripping figure, perfectly clothed, with the exception of shoes and stockings, came up the garden path towards us. His short hair stood up all over his head, and a water-drop stood on end on every spike of it; his complexion was tanned to a golden brown, whilst

as for his clothes, the less said about them the better. Suffice it to remark that what they lacked in buttons they made up for in small pieces of baling wire, which served to keep the garments in question together. As for his feet, they were guiltless of any covering at all, and looked—well, they did not look as if the bath had been an unnecessary luxury. Up the path he came, dripping at every step, but perfectly at ease and composed.

"Sorry I can't ask you in now, Mrs. S.," he said, "but the fact is, I am rather damp. You and your friend must come some other day and dine with me; I should like her to visit me."

E.'s face beamed; this was indeed an honour; and as for me, I was devoured with curiosity to see the inside of his shanty, so we eagerly accepted the invitation, fixing that day week as the date.

Then we said good-bye, and prepared to ride off. Mr. Ffrench, with perfect courtliness, barefooted and dripping as he was, presented us with a flower apiece, and treated us to an elegant bow as we departed, much interested with our adventure. As for the boys, when we got home and informed them of the invitation we had received to dinner at Wild Cat Ranch that day week, they simply roared with laughter.

That day week I was over quite early at E.'s, having done all my work, and baked a pie for the boys, who were to batch, as E. was going to drive me over to Mr. Ffrench's in her buggy, and I was to return and spend the night with her. So we started about nine o'clock, fully determined to enjoy ourselves, and take our time on the way; a lunch-basket, thoughtfully provided by E., occupying the back seat.

When we arrived we saw nothing of either of our hosts; but a neighbouring ranchman, who took our buggy, asked us to "go right away in and lay off our hats." We loitered, however, a little in the garden; it was such a treat to see all the home flowers again. There, in the verandah also, was Mr. Ffrench's bed—for in summer-time he always slept in the open—and by the side of it were a whole heap of "Nineteenth Centuries," and out of curiosity I lifted up the top one and looked at the date; it was the current number for the month. Then we went into the parlour, where, to our great surprise, the table was most beautifully laid for dinner—fine damask and china, real

silver forks and spoons, and sparkling glass.

In the middle was a large glass *épergne* of flowers, beautifully arranged, but nothing was to be seen of either Mr. Ffrench or Benny, except two suits of cloth clothes neatly folded up and laid upon a couple of chairs by the door. There was plenty of fruit upon the table, a Cantelupe melon, great bunches of Concord grapes, with their peculiar musky fragrance, and a big dish of San Louis peaches, far preferable to my mind to the Californian peaches, on account of the woolly skins of the latter. For sweets there were a couple of tarts which E. and I decided, from the look of the paste, must have come from the Sedalia bakehouse; a rich golden pumpkin pie, and four large glass finger-bowls full of the thickest cream. The table was certainly beautifully appointed; no butler in the old country could have laid it better.

It was in great contrast to the rest of the room, for the less said about the state of that the better, although it was easy to see it had had a hasty and perfunctory tidy up. Over the fireplace, which looked as if it had not been blacked for ages, were a couple of old shot-guns, whilst the mantelpiece rejoiced in a box of matches, a pot of vaseline, a very dirty sporting calendar, and a beautiful Crown Derby teacup with a rose in it. Both E. and myself agreed it was really little short of wickedness to use such a teacup, with its proper mark on it too, for flowers.

The chairs and tables left much to be desired in the way of dusting, but the opposite side of the room to the fireplace was filled with a bookshelf, containing the grandest collection of books I had seen in any shanty out West. Many of them, too, were beautifully bound, and some had college arms stamped upon them, and the majority of them were not books you would expect to find in a little wooden shanty on a great prairie miles away from any big city.

There must have been nearly five hundred volumes there, and they were not all "ancient history" either, but the newest philosophical and scientific works of the day were there also. Several good prints adorned the walls, and one wondered more than ever what manner of man this could be who evidently so keenly appreciated all these things, and yet was content—for in his case it could not be necessity—to live so far away from all centres of

civilisation. Amongst the pictures, too, was the faded photograph of an English country house, standing in a park, with a big lake in the foreground, and a herd of deer feeding amongst the oak-trees and bracken fern; there was no name to it, only a date of sixteen or twenty years ago. Could this be Mr. Ffrench's old home?

Just then the door opened hastily, and two perspiring men in shirt-sleeves rushed in, each bearing a covered dish. These were our hosts, and we prepared to shake hands with them; but to our astonishment, they did not take the slightest notice of us, only placed the things upon the table, brought in two other dishes, and then ran away, each carrying off a suit of clothes with him; we might not have been in the room at all, as far as they were concerned. I turned and looked at E., and we both did a quiet laugh, it was so very comical. But in a very short time the door opened again, and this time two very different men came in, washed, and dressed in European cloth clothes, who greeted us now with much cordiality; they had simply been "incog." during the time they cooked the dinner and dished it up. I am bound to say it was beautifully cooked, too, and very nice, for the covered dishes contained roast turkey and boiled cotton tails, as the humble rabbit is called out West, a dish of butter beans, and one of stuffed tomatoes, whilst the suitable sauces for each dish were not forgotten. One does not mean to be greedy, but there is such a joy in partaking of a meal you have not prepared yourself, that I am bound to say that E. and I played a very good knife and fork, much to the satisfaction of our hosts, who looked delighted to see the good things they had provided so much appreciated. The fruit and vegetables were particularly welcome, and it was, I must say, a pleasant change to sit through a whole meal and not hear the word "cow" once mentioned. It was also a treat to talk to a man like Mr. Ffrench, who seemed to have everything at his fingers' ends, and to be quite up to date with all that was going on in the scientific and literary world—only one wondered and wondered at the pity of it all—whilst little Benny chimed in again and again with some kind little speech. For there seemed to be no interest for one of these men in the life around him. The ranchmen round had their cattle and horses, and though the doings of cow-brutes and the conduct of the section men might not be a

very refining or elevating topic of conversation, still it was real, and their life, which lent a certain dignity to the subject, although I must say, with truth, that I often got very tired of it. But here we all seemed to be living in a dream. E spoke of the beautiful mountain scenery all round us, of the grandeur of the snowy peaks towering up into the sky. Mr. Ffrench gave a somewhat weary smile, and declared they were greatly over-rated, "and as for mountain scenery, why, my dear Mrs. S., I agree thoroughly with an old lady I met on the Denver and Rio Grande Cars the other day."

"And what did she say?" I asked.

"She was a worthy person," he replied, "whose husband was evidently rushing her through the States on a tour, and when he pointed out the beauties of the Black Cañon to her, she answered rather crossly, I am afraid: 'Give me a nice red 'ouse and a church steeple, 'Ennery, I'm choke-full of scenery!'"

We all laughed at this, although I felt a little awed at hearing my beautiful Snowy Range spoken of so contemptuously. Dinner being now over, we were asked to stroll round the garden whilst the things were cleared away. Needless to say we offered to help wash up, but we were not allowed to do it; all that would be done in the evening, we were told. So we gladly went out and sat in the verandah, which ran the whole front of the house, and over which was trained an English honeysuckle and China roses, whilst morning glory and Virginian creeper were wreathed round the wooden props which held it up, and old fruit-cans planted with gay nasturtiums were poked in amongst the creepers.

In the verandah also was Mr. Ffrench's bed, close to the head of which were a pile of magazines and a pitcher of water, whilst over the bed, against the shanty wall, hung his Winchester. The flower garden led into the kitchen one, equally carefully planted and kept, and as E. and I looked with envy at all the vegetables we mentally registered a vow and solemn intention that we too would have a garden, even if we had to pack water from the creek for it, every evening when we were dog-gone tired! But I am sorry to say that all these good intentions of ours came to nothing, and when I left the State my share in a garden consisted in some weedy mignonette growing in an old jam-pail, whilst E.'s was a box of nasturtiums and morning glory outside her parlour-

window. Just at that time, however, we were wildly enthusiastic over the idea, and I remember the next time I went into our little city trading two of my bracelets to Ed. Abbots for twenty five-dollar shares in the Ouray gold boom, which was just going on; and remarking to E. that when I realised we would have a slap-up garden. But my shares in the mine repose in a glove-box at this present moment, and my bracelets, for all that I know, still adorn the wrists of Ed.'s best girl. And for the prospective garden I do not care a red cent any longer. Those twenty shares, a few skins of bear and coyote, a box-full of rattlesnake skins and rattles, and a handful of smoky topaz, are all I have still to remind me of my time in the far West.

But all this is a digression whilst Messrs. Ffrench and Walters are clearing away the dinner things, and, to our astonishment, bringing out all the dirty dishes and plates, and laying them down upon the grass. I pinched E. and called her attention to this little arrangement. What could these men be about now? But she only shook her head, and we were asked in to coffee and sponge cake, both very good.

So the afternoon went on, and it was time for us to return to our respective homes, and our host asked if we would like a bunch of flowers to take back with us. Of course we should, so he picked up two paper bags, and we followed him out again with joy. First he stopped in front of some roses, but after smelling them walked off without picking one to another bed, this time one of pinks. If we might have no roses we felt that pinks were the next best things, but to our grief he only touched them lovingly, and passed on to a row of sweet-peas. I can only describe his look here by saying he gloated over the flowers, and in the end the big bunch we had been hoping for resolved itself into a few heads of nasturtiums and sprigs of mignonette, which were put into the paper bags and handed over to us. In the meantime Benny had not been idle, but had filled the back of the buggy with all kinds of vegetables, and I am bound to say that he was far more liberal than his friend; but then the vegetables were not of his growing, and many people are given to liberality with their neighbour's goods. Then we started off on our long drive homewards having thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, and the last thing we saw of our hosts was that they were on cleanliness intent as usual, and turning the garden hose on to all the

dirty crockery to wash up the dishes, an idea, I am sure, which would never have struck the female mind.

"It seems an awfully hopeless sort of life," E. said at last, our laugh having died away. "One wonders what the end of it will be, for they do not grow younger as the years go by. Look at Benny living on from ranch to ranch at his time of life just for grub stakes. And oh! how tired he must be of it all, year in, year out, with not a soul belonging to him out here! I wonder sometimes he does not shoot himself in sheer despair. I guess I should." And the energetic little woman whipped up old Nell with such vigour that that easy-going animal looked round at her mistress in mute enquiry, and I murmured something about his going home to his friends in England if he wanted to; I supposed he could do so.

"Could he?" retorted E. "My dear child, if you live long enough in this country you find it becomes like dram-drinking, you cannot do without it. Indeed, it takes such a hold upon you that even if you do go home for a time you find yourself longing, even amongst the decencies and comforts of civilisation, for the wild freedom of Western ways. I suppose, in spite of all the ages there is a great deal of primitive man, ay, and woman too left in each one of us, and if once it comes to the top it is mighty hard to push under again. Mind you, I speak from experience. Years back I went home for a spell. I cannot tell you how I enjoyed it all; the freedom from work of a menial kind, the daily luxuries of life that I had never looked upon in the light of a luxury before. I revelled in them all, ran round from friend to friend, and sat for hours in ecstatic leisure with my hands in my lap, having a real lazy time. Then the reaction set in, after a few months, and I began to get what, for want of a better word, I call homesick; the snowy peaks and the mountains haunted my dreams, and I pined for the air blowing across the Great Range. And by the time I had crossed the ocean the roughness and freedom of our life here had taken hold of me again; in fact, now I have put so much of my life in here that I don't care if I see it out. It is all very well for you. You have come out for a certain time, and you take it like a perpetual picnic!"

"Where one is always sure of the weather," I laughed, for it was summer then, and we awoke day after day to

brilliant sunshine and bright blue skies, and had quite forgotten the many cold snaps and heavy snows of the terrible Western winter.

But in spite of E.'s tirade I thought then, as I think now, that the Western life is very hard upon women. They "wrestle" through it like the cattle, it is true, but who shall say at what expense of looks and spirits? Indeed, some seem to be born tired, and never to have time to get rested till they go to their last bed under the cotton-wood trees. The Western girl is pretty and kittenish enough, and very loveable, but the period of girlhood is a very short one; once let that be passed, and she might be any age. In old age a certain grace might return, but speaking personally, I do not remember having ever seen a very old woman out West.

And when one of them has cooked her last dinner and done her last week's wash, and is ready dressed in her Sunday silk for her last waggon-ride, I think the ancient epitaph is the best for her:

Here lies a poor woman, who always was tired,
Who lived in a house where help was not hired,
And who, when she died, said, "Dear friends, I
am going
Where no washing is done and no cooking or
sewing.
But everything there is exact to my wishes,
For where no eating is, is no washing of dishes.
I am going to dwell where loud anthems are
ringing,
But having no voice I'll be quit of the singing.
Don't weep for me now, don't weep for me never,
I'm going to do nothing for ever and ever!"

LANDSLIPS.

THE disaster which has fallen upon Sandgate, one of the quietest and pleasantest of watering-places on the South Coast, can hardly be matched in the annals of the past, as far as these islands are concerned. Earthquakes we have had, and more of them than any one would expect who has not studied the subject, and some even in the present century of a serious character, yet the damage caused by them has been slight, compared with the wreck of the charming little town on the Kentish coast. Indeed, such a landslip, although more limited in range, is more destructive in its effects than an ordinary earthquake shock, which gives people a shake-up, but leaves them practically where they were. But the landslip carries away foundations, superstructures, gardens, shrubs, and trees, involving everything in one common ruin.

Traces of enormous landslips are not

uncommon as features in a landscape, and the agencies at work in levelling the hills and filling up the valleys occasionally give proof of their activity in a very startling manner. It was a tremendous slide of earth that formed the sheltered and romantic district of the Undercliff in the Isle of Wight at some remote period, and in many places round about our coasts, and even in inland districts, are the evidences of extensive movements of the earth in the nature of landslips. But the historic record of such events is very imperfect, and can only be pieced out with fragments. Yet sundry catastrophes of a like character may be recalled, with the common feature of ruin and destruction brought upon people in a way they could not have anticipated or have guarded against by any efforts of their own.

Not exactly a landslip, and yet hardly to be otherwise described, was the curious occurrence in 1668, recorded in the "Philosophical Transactions," by which the parish of Downham, in Suffolk, was overwhelmed and almost destroyed. The surface of a great area of sandy waste, becoming loosened by the action of continuous south-westerly gales, was driven bodily upon the cultivated soil, destroying the corn-lands and driving into the little town; "where it hath buried and destroyed divers houses, and hath forced people to preserve the remainder at a greater cost than they were worth." The other end of the town was even in worse plight, for there many houses were overthrown and buried, and their pastures and meadows destroyed.

Another and an amphibious kind of calamity, neither landslip nor inundation, but partaking of the nature of both, was the bursting of Solway Moss in 1771, when a half-solid flood of peat and bog was poured over the fertile valley in its track. A farmer whose house was destroyed and who had to fly for his life before the advancing wall of mud, declared that his first thought was that his dunghill had broken loose and was advancing against him. Anyhow the torrent covered six hundred acres of good arable land and destroyed sixty or seventy houses, although thanks to the sluggish nature of the invading mixture, no human lives were sacrificed, but of cattle and sheep the loss was great.

Here is the contemporary account of an unmistakeable landslip on a large scale, which occurred in 1793 near the village

of Colebrook, now a great centre of ironworks and blast furnaces, but then a thoroughly rural, secluded spot. The scene was a pleasant slope above the River Severn, where a family dwelt in a farmhouse, about five thousand yards distant from the river.

"The man of the house got up about three o'clock in the morning—the season was towards the end of May—but when going to his work, he heard a strange rumbling noise, and felt the ground shake under him, whereupon he roused up all his family. They perceived the ground begin to move, but knew not which way to run. However, they providentially and wonderfully escaped by taking an immediate flight, for just as they got to an adjacent wood, the ground they had left separated from that on which they stood. They first observed a small crack in the ground, about four or five inches wide and a field that was sown with oats, to heave up and roll about like waves of water; the trees moved as if blown with the wind, but the air was calm and serene. The Severn, in which at that time was a considerable flood, was agitated very much, and the current seemed to run upwards. They perceived a great crack run very quickly up the ground from the river. Immediately about thirty acres of land, with the hedges and trees standing, except a few that were overturned, moved, with great force and swiftness, towards the Severn, attended with great and uncommon noise, compared to a large flock of sheep running swiftly. That part of the land next the river was a small wood, in which grew twenty large oaks. The wood was pushed with such velocity into the Severn that it forced the water up in columns a considerable height, like mighty fountains, and drove the bed of the river before it. The current being instantly stopped, occasioned a great inundation above, and so sudden a fall below, that many fish were left on dry land, and many barges were heeled over, and when the stream came down were sunk. The river soon took its course over a large meadow, and in three days wore a navigable channel there. Less than a quarter of an hour completed this dreadful scene."

A similar catastrophe had occurred in 1764 at Aston, Gloucester, where a mass of earth sixteen acres in extent, and twenty or thirty feet in depth, slid down from the side of Bredon Hill, burying the neighbouring pastures, and covering up trees,

bushes, fences, and all signs of cultivation under the débris.

A landslip of the same nature as the Colebrook disaster occurred on the sixteenth of April, 1793, when a large plot of ground many acres in extent moved off from its own proper moorings in the parish of Fownhope, in Herefordshire, near the River Wye, and with trees and buildings all standing, slid bodily down into the bed of the river, suddenly diverting its course, and causing much loss and damage.

All these disasters seem to have followed a season of heavy and continuous rains, and the last year of the eighteenth century was marked by extraordinary and long-continued rains, causing floods and inundations in all directions, and bringing about many minor landslips. Of these the most noticeable was the opening of a huge chasm in Bredon Hill, a noted summit lying on the borders of the counties of Gloucester and Worcester. The southern slope of Bredon was the scene of a landslip already noted, while the more precipitous escarpment towards Worcester-shire now seems to have split into a great fissure.

Again in 1804, on the fourth of May, a violent storm of rain and wind was accompanied by the fall of "a vast body of earth from Beechen Cliffs, near Bath, with hideous ruin and combustion;" a thicket of trees and bushes being precipitated into the road below, a movement which suggested to observers of a literary turn the progress of Birnam Wood to Dunsinane. Another serious landslip is recorded in 1816, the scene being in Norway, at Tiller, near Drontheim, where about one hundred and twenty acres of land, with a depth of sixty feet, slipped into the River Nid, near Store Foss. The month was March, more fruitful in such disasters than any other, but although there had been heavy rains previously, a hard frost prevailed at the time of the disaster. The church, the bridge, and farmhouse disappeared, the farmer was killed in trying to rescue his children, and some eighteen others lost their lives either in the landslip or the inundation that followed. Four years later, in 1820, according to the "Annual Register," "the German papers mention that the village of Strau, in Bohemia, situated on a sandhill, was lately swallowed up during the night by the sinking of the hill, whose base had been undermined by the passage of subterranean waters." All the inhabitants escaped, but

hardly a trace remained of the once smiling village.

The gigantic catastrophes recorded from time to time in Alpine regions, the destruction wrought by avalanches or the disruption of glaciers, and the fall of mountains, do not come within our scope. It will be sufficient to mention the fall of the Rossberg mountain behind the Righi in Switzerland in 1806, with great destruction of villages and hamlets and the loss of five hundred lives, and the comparatively recent destruction of Elm, canton of Glarus, where one hundred and fifty inhabitants perished. And the disaster in July last, at St. Gervais, in French Savoy, in which villages and a great hotel were destroyed, with many human victims, will be freshly remembered.

On a much smaller scale is our next catastrophe, but it is nearer home, and its interest is heightened by its connection with the early days of the gifted author of "Jane Eyre." "At Haworth, in Yorkshire," says the laconic chronicle of the event, "the highlands on Stanbury Moor opened into a chasm forming cavities two hundred and six hundred yards in circumference, from which issued two torrents of mud and water, breaking down bridges and overthrowing cottages in their progress. The River Aire was poisoned as far as Leeds, and all the fish destroyed." Now at that time the Rev. Patrick Brontë was perpetual curate of Haworth, a widower with a young family, the eldest, Charlotte, being then eight years old. Mr. Brontë was an eye-witness of the disaster, and improved the occasion in a sermon to his parishioners which was printed, together with a poem he wrote upon the occasion, and was reprinted in 1885 by R. Brown, Haworth. The preacher describes his own feelings of alarm, heightened by the belief that his children were actually on the scene of the portentous outbreak. "I had sent my little children . . . to take an airing on the common. They stayed longer than I expected. . . . I went to an upper window to look for their return. The heavens over the moors were blackening fast. . . . I heard a deep distant explosion resembling, yet differing from thunder, and I perceived a gentle tremor in the chamber." The children, as it turned out, had gained a place of safety and shelter before the disaster occurred, which would have been indeed calamitous had it swallowed up "Jane Eyre." Mr. Brontë's poem,

by the way, is not without its vigorous passages :

But, see! the solid ground like ocean driven
With mighty force by the four winds of heaven,
In strange commotion rolls its earthy tide!

In 1828, on the fourth of March, there occurred a serious landslip and fall of cliff at Hastings, "a quarter of a mile east of the town, just beyond the east well." In April, 1829, there was a considerable slip and fall of rock at Nottingham. The town is built on sandstone rock, which here and there crops up among houses and gardens, in curious and romantic fashion. Sheltered by a wall of rock, a row of cottages, and a public-house called "The Loggerheads," had stood in safety for generations; but one fine morning the wall slid down and toppled over, and there was an end of the dwellings in question. All the inmates saved themselves; but among the débris the coat-tails of a victim were seen protruding. They belonged to a young man who had been passing at the time, and who was dug out insensible, but who eventually recovered.

A really terrible landslip was that of 1839, on Christmas Eve, on the coast of Devon, at a place called Pinney, near Lyme Regis, when three-quarters of a mile of cliff, with fields, houses, trees, and gardens, fell into ruins. Cottagers who had been making merry with distant friends on Christmas Eve, returned to find that not a vestige of their homes remained, nor of the place where they had stood; all had disappeared in a vast chasm three hundred feet wide and one hundred and fifty feet deep. Another landslip of smaller extent occurred in the same region in the following year.

A landslip on the cliffs between Brighton and Rottingdean, in 1843, carried with it two men who were walking along the heights, and they fell with the falling cliff to a depth of a hundred feet. One man was killed, the other escaped with a few bruises. In the following year, after a wet winter, some three acres of rock and earth, with forty well-grown oak-trees, slid down Dudnor's Hill, at Dormington, in Herefordshire, for a distance of two hundred yards, then all came to a stand on the margin of the River Frome.

The Holmfirth disaster of 1852, which involved the loss of a hundred lives, and destroyed property to the amount of six hundred thousand pounds, was caused by the bursting of a reservoir, and does not come within our category, and when

railway embankments give way, the occurrence is to be classed rather as an engineering disaster than as in the range of natural phenomena. But a heavy fall of chalk in Abbot's Cliff tunnel in January, 1877, followed next day by a serious landslip on the line near Dover, was due rather to natural causes than to any defect in construction. But all traffic between Folkestone and Dover was suspended for several weeks, and omnibuses took the passengers from one place to the other. Later in the same year a curious incident occurred at Camborne, in Cornwall, where the local volunteers had just been dismissed from a full parade on their own ground, when just after the last men had marched off, the whole parade ground disappeared with a terrible noise, and in its place opened out a horrible chasm, one hundred and fifty yards wide, and six hundred feet deep. Presumably the fall was caused by the breaking in of the roof of some abandoned mine, and, doubtless, the measured tramp of the volunteers on the surface had been the immediate cause of the slip.

To complete the record of disastrous landslips we must leave the limits of the British Isles and pass over to Quebec, where in 1889 occurred a landslip below the citadel, in which seven houses were destroyed and thirty-six persons perished. Again, we must take flight across the huge Western continent, to Vancouver's Island, where after a rainy season a block of land slid bodily into the Skeena river, destroying nine houses, and causing the death of forty individuals. Then we may return to our English annals, in which is recorded in August, 1890, a big landslip at Scarborough, where the north-east corner of the Castle Hill tumbled into the sea, but without damage to person and with very little to property.

As we approach the end of the century we come to a sort of premonition of the Sandgate disaster, in a landslip in Elham Valley, near Folkestone, on the night of the twentieth of January, 1891, when a labourer's cottage was driven, by falling earth and snow, across the road into a meadow beyond. Of the sleeping family, father, mother, and an infant were killed, while three other children escaped unhurt.

For the district of chalk and sand, with its bold cliffs and romantic fissures, which give such a charm to the Kentish coast, is not without its experiences of landslips.

At one time or other the old Roman station, *Portus Lemanis*, known in the neighbourhood as *Studfall Castle*, must have experienced a fatal landslip in which were buried half its walls and towers, perhaps choking the river-bed and sending it round by a distant course. But coming to times less remote, yet so long ago as 1801, when *Sandgate Castle* was mounted with guns, and might expect at any time to exchange a shot with a French frigate or privateer, there happened in that year, on the eighth of March, a downfall thus recorded by the chronicler of the period :

"An immense portion of that stupendous eminence, the cliff bordering the sea between *Folkestone* and *Sandgate*, at about a quarter of a mile from the former, suddenly gave way and was precipitated below with great violence, and several smaller fragments have continued falling at various times. The footpath from *Sandgate* to *Folkestone* went across the part destroyed, but happily nobody was passing at the time." And on the other side of *Folkestone*, a new road which had been laid out not many years ago towards the romantic chasm called the *Warren*, was by some movement of the earth altogether crumpled up and destroyed.

But the recent landslip at *Sandgate* is unexampled in the greatness of its effects. On a barren hillside the earth-slide would not have been of much consequence, but coming upon a thriving little town and utterly dismantling and ruining the best part of it, the disaster becomes something terrible, especially to those who, like the greater part of mankind, can only make both ends meet with extreme difficulty. Three-quarters of a mile of sea-front drawn forward like a strip of carpet, and crumpling up and breaking everything it brings with it, terraces, streets, villas, forms a disaster of such proportions that only national aid can repair what is really a national calamity. There was nothing about *Sandgate* to suggest the danger of such a catastrophe. The town had grown and increased, and had become a picture of brightness and verdure, but it was no latter-day watering-place, got up by speculators and builders. When *Folkestone* was, if not a fuzzy down, yet a very small and fishy town with a silted-up harbour, and narrow streets festooned with dried dabs, *Sandgate* was a neat little watering-place, not much known to Londoners, but the resort of gentle and simple from the county of Kent. To place little *Sandgate* in

a way to regain its former state of quiet prosperity and independence, is a matter surely not beyond the resources of this great and wealthy country. There is a feeling, too, among the people of the neighbourhood, that the action of the *Trinity Board* in blowing up with heavy charges of dynamite the wrecks of the "*Calypso*" and the "*Benvenue*" in the bay before the town, was at all events contributory to the disaster. The earth-waves caused by heavy explosions travel far and have a powerful influence on surrounding strata, and the official dynamiting may have started a landslip which might otherwise not have come off for another hundred years, and perhaps not even then.

AIDS TO BEAUTY.

WERE I a woman, and were the fairies to offer me the proverbial choice of gifts, I am inclined to think that I should ask from them the gift of perfect beauty. Not that I am quite clear in my own mind what perfect beauty is. What man has not had, at some time or other, an ideal woman of his dreams? Yet what man has been able to put his ideal upon canvas? To speak of describing an ideal woman is almost to speak of an absurdity. One has read, in poetry and in prose, abundant descriptions—some of them well done—of women whose beauty, according to their describers, was like unto a dream. Who, as the modern phrase has it, has been able to materialise one of the women who have been so described? It is notorious that no author has been satisfied with a mere artist's reproduction of his lovely heroine. The truth is that though his own fancy may have painted her, his command of language was, necessarily, inadequate to give us just the woman as she was to him.

If you have been—as one may venture to hope you have been—a student of fairy tales, you will have noticed how most of the gifts which the fairies have bestowed have turned out to be two-edged swords. To their recipients they have turned out to be the cause, probably, of at least as much pain as joy. The woman on whom the fairy gift of beauty has been conferred must, in the ordinary course of things, certainly come to learn how true this is. The hour in which this truth will especially come home to her will be the hour in which she begins to realise that beauty—even

beauty such as hers—must fade. One can conceive of few moments more pathetic than those moments in which the woman whose beauty has witched the world, confronted by the uncompromising fidelity of her mirror, is compelled to own, even to herself, that the power by means of which she won her empire is already on the wane. No wonder that she resorts to artifice. No wonder that she tightly shuts her lips, and metaphorically sets her back against the wall, and tells herself that so long as art can do anything to arrest the decay of nature, or even to conceal the ravages which time has made, she will not resign her sway—no, not to the youngest and freshest rival of them all. This is the time when she begins to talk of “chits,” and the inanity of early maidenhood, and to hint that only a woman of a certain age is a fit companion for a man.

One may be disposed to forgive the woman who has been beautiful, if, in her desperate attempts to retain her beauty, she paints and powders, and chooses to make of herself a thing of borrowed shreds and patches. But when women tell us—as some of them do tell us now and then—that men like a woman to caricature her own womanhood; that they prefer—it comes to that!—imitation beauty to the real article, they require of us a faith too great for ordinary human nature. To be told, as I was told a little time ago—and by a lady—that men do not care for women unless they paint and powder, is to have too strong a strain placed upon one's natural civility. That this same informant was guilty of a perhaps pardonable feminine exaggeration, when she declared that, nowadays, all women used both paint and powder, I am assured. Had she confined herself to the statement that a very large number of women are indebted, for what they call their charms, to anything but nature, she would have delivered herself of an utterance on the literal veracity of which she might safely have staked, as our transatlantic cousins have it, her “bottom dollar.”

The lady of fashion may not be aware that she is guilty of a reversion to savagery when she calls in artificial aids to the help of her natural attractions; but she is. Among savage peoples it is an almost general custom to revert to such auxiliaries. The South Sea cannibal, who tattoos his body with hideous devices, only does, in his way, what the lady of fashion does in hers. He endeavours to make himself

more beautiful. It may be doubted if he fails more egregiously than the average painted lady. In front of one there lies a heap of so-called fashion papers. They are full of advertisements of “aids to beauty.” One supposes that these things must sell, or they would scarcely be so largely advertised. There are hair dyes. One has reason to believe that these are not popular only among members of the other sex. A Government return giving an exact statement of the sale, during a single period of twelve months, of hair dye in the United Kingdom, would be an interesting document. Judging from the amount spent on advertising the various preparations, the sale must be enormous. Did anybody ever see hair which had been dyed, which did not advertise the fact as glaringly as any newspaper advertisement? Do those who dye their hair desire to advertise? Do they like that peculiar form of notoriety? There are many men in the world, and many tastes, but what a curious taste is theirs!

One finds among the advertisements of “aids to beauty,” that preparations are obtainable for the prevention of wrinkles and crow's-feet. Is it possible that any creature, with any claim to civilisation, can believe that a harmless chemical preparation can smooth out, or ward off, the wrinkles with which time marks the passage of the years? Consider also the nose-machines, freckle powders, ear-improvers, depilatories, patent articles which are warranted to change, on the instant, as with the stroke of a magician's wand, thin faces into plump ones, decoctions which will give light and brightness to the eyes—there is no defect in nature which these advertisers, if we can believe them, will not make good.

Beauty! Is beauty to be obtained like this? When will women—and, oftentimes, the patrons of these “aids to beauty” are our own wives and daughters—learn that there is a beauty in advancing age? That, at any rate, there is a greater beauty in honest age than in dishonest youth. The woman of forty-five who, while, as she has a right to do, and ought to do, she makes the best of herself, still makes no attempt to conceal her five-and-forty years, is far more attractive than the woman of forty-five who, by means of “aids to beauty,” seeks to pass as twenty. I, for my part, cannot conceive it otherwise. I never encountered a case, within my own experience, which did not go to

prove my point. As for the young girls who smother themselves with powder, or daub themselves with rouge, in their diseased anxiety to be what they are not, it is these girls who make old age so hideous, and who make of womanhood a mockery and a gibe.

I do not know in what beauty does consist. I find that what Jones deems beauty does not, necessarily, seem beautiful to me. And the case sometimes stands the other way. In the woman who to me seems beautiful, Jones perceives no charm. But on one point I have reason to know that Jones and I are both agreed—that there is no beauty where there is no cleanliness; that a woman must be sweet, in a physical as well as in a moral, and in a sentimental, sense. The woman who uses “aids to beauty” never can be sweet—never! The stuff with which she conceals herself may seem sweet; but the skin which it conceals—never! It must be flavoured, more or less, with the refuse of bygone “aids to beauty.” There is, in one of the fashion papers which lies in front of me, an answer to a correspondent, which throws a lurid light on the subject of artificial beauty versus natural cleanliness. The correspondent has apparently asked a question about what is called “face enamelling.” In the answer she is told that, if her face is properly “enamelled,” the “enamel” ought not to require renewing more than once or twice a year. Think what that means. Think of having one’s face entirely covered with a preparation of plaster, which, if properly laid on, need not be renewed—possibly, even, not retouched, to clean—more than once or twice a year. How can a woman, who submits herself to such a process, in any possible sense of the word, be sweet?

You say that this is an extreme case. We will hope so. Though the woman who “powders” her face practically “enamels” herself, though she may not carry the process quite to the bitter end. In what the charm consists, of “powder” on a woman’s face, I never could understand. What is it used for? One sometimes sees young women, young girls, in fact, the modest daughters of decent folk, with powder laid so thick upon their faces that one wonders by what means they prevent its falling off. They look ghastly objects, to me. As for kissing them—and one supposes that all women, at some period of their lives, do like to be kissed—fancy pressing one’s lips

into a powder-box! Has the modern young gentleman of fashion advanced so far as to have imbibed a taste for that?

We must all of us have met the woman who always carries a powder-puff in her pocket. Directly she finds herself alone, she dabs it on her face. There are ladies who always carry a “toilet-box”—actors and actresses would more correctly call it a “make-up” box—with them in their carriages. As they pass from house to house, they add a shade of colour here, tone down a shade of colour there. One cannot but suspect that the present rage for darkened rooms has something to do with “aids to beauty.” Small wonder that the women whose complexions will not wash, favour an “artistic” light! All the resources of every sort of art must be summoned to their aid, if they are to attain salvation. They hope to be able to pass muster “in the dark, with a light behind them.” They know too well that honest daylight will make it obvious what painted things they are.

It may be a consolation to some folks to be able to reflect that none of these things are new. Probably “aids to beauty” were in existence, and in common use, before the Flood. Certainly our great-grandmothers, and our great-grandmothers, were some of the most painted things that ever were. And there were men, even in those days, who cried out “Fie, for shame!” It is an old tale, which is always being told over and over again. When one hears, and reads, of the march of progress and of the advance of civilisation, surely one may be forgiven if one is moved to smile. As a matter of fact, we are pretty well where our fathers were. True, nowadays we have electricity, and steam, and gas. Inanimate things may have changed, but hardly men. And women still paint their faces as of old. The same motive prompted them then which prompts them now—the desire to stand well in the eyes of men.

What have women not done to enable them to do that? It is true enough that men desire, always have desired, and always will desire to stand well in the eyes of women. But with men, that is not the first and paramount desire of their lives; that is not the end and aim of all their being. Did you ever know a man who cared for nothing but pleasing women? How many women there are who care for nothing but pleasing men! Here it is not charged against them as a fault, it is

merely stated as a fact. How often has a woman not told you that some other woman, whose name has been mentioned, cares only for men? You are singular if you have never been the subject of such a confidence. Women themselves admit it of themselves. If they did not, we have eyes which enable us to see. Men constantly get on, and get on very well indeed, without having any sort of intercourse with women. Women themselves will be the first to tell you how dull it is without a man about the place.

Whenever I see a painted, or a powdered, girl or woman, I am apt to wonder for whom the trap is laid; if she has some particular victim already in her eye. If the woman is a married woman, I take it for granted that the intended victim can scarcely be her husband. One can hardly conceive of a husband, who loves his wife, desiring her to paint her cheeks, or kohl her eyebrows, or belladonna her eyes, for the sake of pleasing him. For my part, I find it difficult to imagine any circumstances in which such a husband would desire his wife to conceal her own charms even under a shower of powder. For whom, then, does the married painted lady paint? I wonder! When such an one comes across my path, I am, as a rule, inclined to suspect that hers has been the sort of marriage which spells failure. Was there ever a woman, who was happy as a mother and a wife, who was content to let her children know that their mother's face was painted? If a woman paints before her marriage, probably, as is the case with the habitual dram-drinker, she finds it difficult to leave the habit off. In that case, she merits the sympathy which the world accords the dipsomaniac. Her lot is hard. Can one conceive a true woman, a true mother, kissing and fondling her baby, with painted lips and powdered face? To me, the idea is almost disgusting.

That is one of the charms of "aids to beauty." Like the drunkard, whose thirst increases, a woman wants more and more of them. The young girl who commences with violet powder, by degrees requires a touch of rouge upon her cheeks, and something to give her lips a shade of colour. Cosmetics are never harmless—in the real sense of harmlessness. There seem to be two sorts of truth in this strange world: the sort of truth which proceeds from the lips of decent men and women, which is truth; and the sort of truth which one

too often finds in advertisements, which is lies. The advertisement which asserts that such and such a cosmetic is entirely harmless, is an illustration of this latter sort of truth. It is a nice question in morals, how one ought to regard such an advertiser. One could scarcely, nowadays, expect such a person to inform the world—and to pay for such information, out of his own pocket, by the line—that the stuff he advertises would play the mischief with the face of any woman who was fool enough to use it. The secret of the present enormous sale of cosmetics, in a measure, lies in the fact that the people who once begin to use them, can never leave them off. If a woman who has used cosmetics regularly for, say, five years, were suddenly to make up her mind never to use them more, what a thing of horror she would be! She would be a bold woman who, under such circumstances, would venture to, literally, show her face to her acquaintance or to her friends.

It may be doubted if cosmetics are not more insidious than either drugs or drink. The large majority of the people who, in the teetotaler's sense, drink, never drink immoderately. I doubt if the majority of the women who use cosmetics, practise moderation. It is no use for Dolly, or Lily, or any of our numerous daughters, to tell us that they "only" use a sprinkling of powder—because "everybody does it." If they once begin to powder, at the very least, they will always have to powder. They will be fortunate if they do not have to finish with "enamelling."

I have, now and then, had to attend weddings—other people's as well as my own. I have seen "blushing brides" standing at the altar, powdered up to the eyes. Talk of "bridal bloom." That sort of thing seems, to me, to be carrying the metaphor almost too far. The incongruity is not only grotesque, it is revolting. Each man has his own ideas of marriage. Possibly some men have no objection to a "powdered" bride. For my part, I doubt if many "powder" marriages are made in heaven. Surely if there is a moment in which a woman should appear, and be, her own true self unto a man, it is the moment in which she calls on God to witness her willing consecration of herself to the duties of a wife, at what is supposed to be His altar. What poll-parrot balderdash the marriage service must be to the "powdered" bride!

A woman once told me that, in theory,

men make a great deal of fuss about the sort of thing about which I am making a fuss just now, but that, in practice, some of the most popular, brightest, and cleverest women in society were among those who made no secret of the fact that they relied for their personal attractions upon "aids to beauty." I felt, and I feel, that this was true. And when she went on to ask me if I had never known such an one myself, I unhesitatingly admitted that I had. I fancy that I rather took the wind out of her sails, as regards the point of the argument towards which she was endeavouring to steer, when I went on to add that I had known many a popular, bright, and clever man who was as false outside as he was in.

A man, or a woman, may be popular, bright, and clever, and be universally admitted to be all these, but it by no means therefore follows that one would desire to have such a person always at one's side. That woman is happiest, let them say no who will, who finds a true mate with whom to share her life. One may lay it down, almost as an axiom, that no true man would wish to wed a painted woman, or, indeed, any girl or woman who patronises "aids to beauty." That men do marry such women is, of course, a matter of notoriety. But what sort of men are they, and what sort of marriages? Sharp marries Miss Powderpuff. Miss Powderpuff has—how many hundred, or thousand, pounds a year? One may be forgiven for suspecting that Sharp marries those hundreds, or thousands, and not Miss Powderpuff. Noodle marries Miss Coralips. They say that Miss Coralips powdered her cheeks even in the nursery. But everybody knows that, mentally, morally, and physically, Noodle would be grossly flattered were one to accept him as a type of the Missing Link. Old Doty marries that frisky widow, Mrs. Kohled. Does not the world exclaim, with well-placed sympathy, Alas, poor Doty! Now and then powdered girls, and painted women, have been married for the sake of uniting two estates, or two incomes, or two social or business interests. Occasionally such girls and women have been married for the sake of getting a leg up the social ladder. One sort of marriage I cannot credit that they have ever made. I doubt if a man, that was a man, who, as Wordsworth puts it, still felt his "life in every limb," and whose respect for, and belief in, feminine purity and clean-

liness was not wholly dead, ever, for love's sake, married a painted woman.

When one marries, one desires to have some sort of faint idea of who it is, and of what it is, one marries. One does not care to have to wonder what has become of her complexion, of her eyelashes, of her eyebrows, of the rich red colour that was on her lips. One does not even like to have to speculate as to the whereabouts of the luxuriant glory of her hair. One does not mind observing the artistic skill with which "aids to beauty" have been resorted to, say, upon the stage. One may even find a pleasure—of a kind!—in studying their effect in the ball-room, or the drawing-room. But one desires to have no intimate and personal acquaintance with them—for love's sake!—if you please.

A BREAD-AND-BUTTER MISS.

A STORY IN SIX CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN I made my appearance in the dining-room I found that Sir John had been as good as his word, and had given his abridged version of our adventures, which was still being discussed by the rest of the company. Cara's mind seemed chiefly exercised on the subject of Quick-silver.

"I do hope he is not seriously injured," she was saying. "There is not one of my relations that I couldn't do without better than that cob—and very few of my friends."

"I don't think you need be anxious about him," returned Sir John soothingly. "The lameness was really very slight, but knowing what a favourite he was, I thought it wiser not to risk the long journey."

"I can't understand," put in Joey, who had a nasty habit of trying to pick holes in plausible explanations—"I can't now understand how it was that you did not get home earlier. The only train you could possibly have come by was the five thirty-five from Halesford. I should have thought you ought to have been home two hours ago."

At this remark I felt myself getting crimson, and bitterly regretted that I had not insisted the whole truth should be told. But Sir John was quite equal to the occasion.

"Of course we ought," he replied glibly.

"But the train was late to begin with, and when we got to Hornby the dog-cart was out. We had to wait till it came in, and then the horse scarcely had a leg to stand upon."

This explanation appeared to satisfy everybody, even Joey. Only Lady Downham remarked with her little disdainful smile:

"I never heard of such a series of undeserved misfortunes—out of a novel."

I found myself, as usual, seated next to Sir John, but with Sereno on my other hand. Having had more than enough of the society of my late companion, I began to talk to the tenor with feverish eagerness.

"Please don't notice how much I eat, M. Sereno," I said. "Remember, I haven't tasted food since two o'clock, and now you have had half an hour's start of me."

"Oh, it's quite a treat to see a natural appetite," he returned. "I can't remember the time when mine was not artificial. But, like false teeth, it seems to answer just as well, if not better, than the genuine article."

I smiled appreciatively. If only he would go on talking I should be saved from the awkwardness of sitting silent, or speaking to Sir John. I was dimly conscious that Sereno looked at me with more interest than he was wont to bestow upon so insignificant a personage.

"Your long fast seems to have agreed with you," he remarked. "We would all go without our tea if we could be sure that such abstinence would have the same effect upon our complexions."

"Oh, coming into this hot room after being out in the air all day has made my face burn," I said, putting up a hand to my hot cheeks. "I suppose I'm the colour of a fine healthy beetroot?"

"I'll lend you my eyes as a looking-glass," he returned, with an expressive glance. "If you look close enough, you'll see two miniature portraits of yourself."

"Oh, thank you!" I said, in some embarrassment. "But I think I can see myself better in this spoon."

I took up my dessert-spoon, and gazed at the distorted image of my own features. Sereno threw back his head and laughed.

"Upon my word, you are complimentary," he exclaimed. "I can't say I admire your taste. You won't find that spoon such a flattering mirror as the other one."

At this application of my innocent re-

mark, I felt myself turning a livelier crimson than before.

"I am not going to talk any more," I said, trying to assume a dignified attitude. "I cannot attend properly to anything but my dinner."

In the drawing-room after dinner the social atmosphere seemed to me rather condensed. Cara was discussing the latest piece of society scandal with Lady Downham, and Mrs. Wyncott was hopelessly monosyllabic in response to all attempts at conversation. Trix Haughton had gone to the billiard-room, where Captain Ayrton usually joined her for his after-dinner cigarette.

With an unaccustomed feeling of loneliness and depression I retired to a corner of one of the window-seats, and wished myself at home. I had time to grow heartily tired of my own society before the men came in from the dining-room. Sereno, who usually took very little notice of me, was the first to find his way into my corner.

"You look like a feminine version of 'Little Jack Horner,' minus the pie," he said. "Minus also the same grounds for self-laudation. You couldn't say: 'What a good girl am I,' could you?"

"Why not?" I asked.

"I leave the answer to your own conscience," he replied solemnly.

There was a pause. The tenor had never been a favourite of mine, partly because I had always felt a vague distrust of him, partly because, hitherto, he had always treated me as if I were a little girl.

"Miss Western," he went on irrelevantly, "did you know there was an aloe in blossom in the conservatory?"

"No," I exclaimed, with genuine interest. "I didn't know there was an aloe there at all. When did it come out?"

"Early this morning," he answered seriously. "You know they go off with a report. I heard it go pop when I was dressing this morning, and I thought some one must be having champagne at that unhallowed hour. But would you like to come and see it? You won't have the chance again for another hundred years, you know."

"Oh, yes, I should," I said. "I have never seen an aloe."

The drawing-room opened into the conservatory, which was lighted with Chinese lanterns, and fitted up with comfortable little seats for two only. Sereno conducted

me to the further end of the building, and paused before a stand on which was a large and not particularly inviting-looking cactus, with blossoms that had already seen better days.

"Allow me to introduce you to this aloe," he said.

"But that's not an aloe," I exclaimed in disappointment. "That's only a cactus, and it was out days ago. Why, the flowers are beginning to drop already."

"Well, never mind; it will be all the same a hundred years hence," he rejoined soothingly. "You didn't really suppose I brought you here to look at an aloe, did you?"

"Yes, of course I did," I replied. "You said so."

He laughed.

"You are a marvellous little actress," he remarked. "You took us all in, even me. But having once dropped the mask, don't you think it's rather late to put it on again?"

"I haven't the least idea what you're talking about," I said in some alarm, for I thought he must either have had too much champagne, or else have taken leave of his senses. "I am going back to the drawing-room."

"Now don't be unkind. I don't ask for a tête-à-tête of half a day, but you might give me half an hour. Sit down here," he continued, pointing to a seat behind the flower-stand. "That vegetable may not be an aloe, but I expect it has played gooseberry for a couple before now."

I made no reply, but turned to go back to the drawing-room. Seeing that I was in earnest, the spoilt society pet lost his temper.

"You little coquette!" he exclaimed. "Do you think you can play fast and loose with me?"

As he spoke, he put his arm round my waist, and tried to make me sit down on the bench. But long walks, lawn-tennis, and plain fare are promoters of better physical condition than heavy dinners, unlimited cigarettes, and the exercise of the billiard-table; consequently, I was more than a match for the tenor. I wrenched myself free from him with a force that sent him staggering against the flower-stand. As I fled out of the nearest door which led into the hall I heard a crash, and looking over my shoulder, saw Sereno, the stand, and the cactus all in a heap on the floor together. I did not wait to pick

up the bits, but rushed headlong across the hall, and was only stopped in my wild career by coming violently in contact with somebody who had just stepped out of the smoking-room.

"Good heavens, Miss Western!" said Mr. Colthurst's voice. "What is the matter? Has anything happened?"

"Oh, nothing," I answered vaguely, for I was half-dazed by the shock. "I was only—running."

"Yes, that was very evident," he said, smiling. "And when you run you are nearly as dangerous to life and limb as the Dane himself. But," he added in more serious tones, "you are as white as death, and trembling from head to foot. Come into the library and sit down for a minute. I can see you have been frightened. I should like to know what or who frightened you?"

"Oh, nothing—nobody," I said, as I sank with a sigh of relief into a comfortable arm-chair. For some reason that I could not explain even to myself, Mr. Colthurst's mere presence inspired me with a feeling of confidence and security that was doubly refreshing after my recent unfortunate experiences.

"Now, you are trying to put me off," he said gently, in answer to my last words. "And you know you always tell me the exact truth. Don't give up that excellent habit now, or I shall think your experience of the world has really spoilt you."

"I did not mean to say what was not true," I answered. "I spoke without thinking. You were quite right—I was frightened, and somebody did frighten me; but I would rather not say who it was."

"Well, without knowing who he is, I can tell you what he is—a cad. I believe he has made you cry. Are those tears in your eyes, or is it only the lamplight?"

"No, it is only the light," I said, turning my head away, for the sympathy in his voice moved me strangely. "And I am so tired! I wish I were at home; I wish I had never come here."

A sudden wave of self-pity came over me, and was answerable for a big tear which, in silent contradiction of my words, rolled down my cheek and fell into my lap. I hoped that Mr. Colthurst might not have noticed it; but that hope was quickly dispelled.

"My poor little child!" he said, kneeling down beside my chair. "If only I had the right to take care of you, that

would be the last tear you should ever shed. Theo, won't you give me that right? You know I love you. Do you think you could ever care for a worthless fellow like me?"

At these words I sat straight up in my chair and gazed at him in genuine amazement.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" I said. "I always liked you very much, but not in that way. And, indeed, I had no idea that you cared about me. Everybody said that you couldn't bear girls."

"Ah, but that was before I knew you," he returned. "There is only one girl in the world for me now, and I love her. Let me ask you just one question," he went on. "Do you like—as you call it—any one else in that way?"

"Oh, no," I replied, with an irrepressible shudder. "I believe I hate every other man in the whole world."

"Well, that's satisfactory, so far," he said. "I know I have spoken too soon. You are still a child, and it is cruel to talk to you of love. But I shall be content to wait if you will let me try to win you. Your heart may be whole, but surely it cannot be so hard that love and devotion may not soften it in time. I am an ugly fellow, and double your age, while the money that is my principal recommendation in other women's eyes is less than nothing in yours. I know there is nothing about me to attract the fancy of a girl like you; the only good thing I have to offer you is my love. Ah, you are trembling still. Theo, if you will give yourself to me, I swear you shall never tremble again."

"I know you are very kind," I said, half-touched by his humility, half-frightened by his passion. "You are quite different from the others. I always felt that I could trust you."

"Then give me a little hope," he went on eagerly. "I have been an idle, good-for-nothing fellow, and only wasted my life hitherto. Only give me a chance, and I will show you that I can become something better than a mere cumberer of the ground. With your help I believe I could do some work in the world."

"I should like to help you," I replied. "But I don't want to be married—at least, not for years."

"You shall never be married if you don't wish it," he rejoined soothingly. "But since you trust me, I want you to agree to something I am going to propose. I want you to let me give out our engage-

ment to-morrow before you leave the house. Don't look so alarmed; I promise you shall not be bound. I will wait a year, two years, longer if need be; and if in the end I fail to win your love, you shall be as free as air. You shall never come to me unless you come willingly. But I have a motive for making this request just now, and it is not altogether a selfish one. Do you agree?"

By this time I had reached the end of my self-command, and the tears were coming unchecked.

"I'll agree to anything," I murmured despairingly, "if you'll only let me go now."

"You poor child, you are quite worn out," he said tenderly. "You must have a good night's rest, or you won't be fit for the journey to-morrow. Remember, you have got some one to take care of you now, some one who won't let you be worried or frightened any more."

He took my hand and kissed it, then led me to the door.

"The coast is clear," he remarked, looking out. "They are all in the drawing-room, shrieking over some idiotic game."

I stole out into the hall, and then, without a glance behind, flew up the stairs and along the corridors to my own room. My mind was so completely in a whirl that I found it almost impossible to realise the change in my own position. As far as I could understand, I had agreed to a nominal engagement with Mr. Colthurst. Of love, in the ordinary sense of the word, I knew as much or as little as most girls of seventeen. I liked Mr. Colthurst, and I felt absolute confidence in him; perhaps, some day, I thought, I might experience for him that strange and apparently uncomfortable feeling of which I had read in novels and poetry. Meanwhile, I consoled myself with his assurance that I was free as long as I desired my freedom.

The following morning was one of general leave-taking and departure. At breakfast plans were being formed for future meetings, invitations given, and time-tables consulted. Under cover of the general confusion I was able to "blush unseen" when Mr. Colthurst entered the room and dropped into a chair at my side. He did not say much, but he seemed to take my cup and plate under his special protection, and even the marmalade, as handed by him, had all the effect of a tender offering.

As it was necessary for me to travel by an early train in order to get to Dewmead in the day, it had been arranged that I should be sent to the station in the dog-cart directly after breakfast. I looked forward to the leave-takings, and to the announcement that was to be made, with a feeling not far short of dread. I retired to my room until I heard the dog cart at the door, and then descended to the hall, where I found the whole party assembled to see me off. I was just about to begin my farewells when Mr. Colthurst made his appearance, coat on arm and hat in hand.

"Why, Mr. Colthurst," exclaimed Cara "you look as if you were about to set out on a journey, too. I thought you were not going till this afternoon."

"No, my plans are changed," he replied coolly. "I am going to escort Miss Western home. I want you to congratulate me, please. Theo has consented to be my wife."

This announcement was followed by a moment, that seemed like an hour, of absolute silence. I dared not look up; I hung my head, and felt as guilty as when, in my childish days, I had been discovered in a scrape of more than ordinary magnitude.

Trix Houghton was the first to regain the use of her tongue. She came forward, threw her arms round my neck, and gave me a resounding kiss.

"I congratulate you both with all my heart," she exclaimed. "It's the best piece of news I've heard for a long time. I declare I haven't been so pleased about anything since I was engaged myself."

By this time Cara also had recovered from her astonishment.

"Of course we all congratulate you," she said, in rather acid tones. "But you took us just a little by surprise. You have kept your secret very cleverly; I don't

think any one could possibly have guessed it."

"We didn't know it ourselves until last night," said Mr. Colthurst. "And we agreed not to mention the interesting fact until this morning."

The ice once broken, more congratulations followed. Mrs. Wyncott, who had treated me with studied coldness the preceding evening, seemed in a moment to have regained all her former sweetness.

"I hope I shall see a great deal of you next season," she said, pressing my hand warmly. "Of course you will be presented on your marriage."

"There's plenty of time to think about that," put in Mr. Colthurst hastily, as he perceived the distress in my face, "but we ought to start at once if we mean to catch this train."

As I passed out of the door I heard Sereno murmur with a sneer that was inspired, perhaps, by painful reminiscences of cactus points:

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